

SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICE

June 26, 2022

WORDS OF WELCOME

INTROIT: #11 v.v. 1, 3 & 4 “Bring Many Names”

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CALL TO WORSHIP: *

L: The way of our God is holy.

C: Holy One, we seek your presence in our midst.

L: The way of our God is wondrous.

C: Wondrous God, we marvel at your works and marvelous deeds.

L: The way of our God is awesome.

C: Awesome God, we call out to you in hope.

INVOCATION: *

L: Liberating One, we keep you before us. Our souls rejoice and our hearts are gladdened. Our very beings find safety and security in your presence. We approach you with thanksgiving and anticipation. Enliven us to be your people in the world.

*All: Embolden us to live in your freedom. Empower us to be your good news.
Stand up in us and show us the path of life. Amen.*

PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:

L: Restoring God, too often we accept the conditions of the world around us and impose limitations on what is possible. We bind ourselves to societal conventions, norms, and pressure rather than follow you and your way.

We conform to the values of this world rather than pursue the fruit of the Spirit.

All: Show us the path of life and freedom in you.

Teach us to plant seeds of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. May we perennially bear that fruit.

*Moment of Silent Confession
& Reflection on God's Forgiveness, Restoration and Redemption*

ASSURANCE OF GOD'S GRACE: *

L: The Guiding Spirit opens us to new life and leads us to right paths. Hear the voice that continually calls, leads, and companions with us. Life in the Spirit is constantly renewed and restored. Let the grace of God nurture our roots and allow our flourishing.

All: Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on us!

HYMN OF RESPONSE: #14 “How Can I Say Thanks”

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SCRIPTURE:

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1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21 (NRSVUE)

¹⁵ Then the Lord said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. ¹⁶ Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel, and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place.

Elisha Becomes Elijah's Disciple

¹⁹ So he set out from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat, who was plowing. There were twelve yoke of oxen ahead of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle over him. ²⁰ He left the oxen, ran after Elijah, and said, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." Then Elijah said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?" ²¹ He returned from following him, took the yoke of oxen, and slaughtered them; using the equipment from the oxen, he boiled their flesh and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out and followed Elijah and became his servant.

Galatians 5:1, 13–25 (NRSVUE)

¹ For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

The Nature of Christian Freedom

¹³ For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become enslaved to one another. ¹⁴ For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵ If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

The Works of the Flesh

¹⁶ Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

The Fruit of the Spirit

²² By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.

A TIME OF REFLECTION:

Called to Life by the Spirit

I have proclaimed on numerous occasions that God provides each of us with a calling and purpose for life; we make the choice on how we respond to that. I believe this is the underlying theme that ties today's scripture readings together.

No matter what our specific calling is in the body of Christ, first and foremost, all are called to life by the Spirit. That calling is never forced but invitational. When one accepts that calling from God, it is accompanied by transformation and challenge. Sometimes that calling comes directly from God, just like when the risen Christ confronted the Apostle Paul on the road to Damascus, but often times God extends that call to us through other people.

In the case of Elisha, his call to serve God as a prophet came through the prophet Elijah. Elisha's initial response was that he needed to bid farewell to his family and then he would join Elijah. Elijah basically told Elisha, "Do whatever you think you need to do, I have let you know what God's plans are for you, but it is up to you to decide what you do with that offer." Clearly the choice to accept the call was in the hands of Elisha. How did he respond? He bid farewell to his family and destroyed his connections to his past life, so that he couldn't be tempted turn back to his former life, and then went and followed Elijah. We have all heard the phrase, "Don't burn your bridges," but sometimes bridges are meant to be burned when they get in the way of us following God's plan for our life and who God created us to be.

Galatians tells us that we are called in not just to specific vocations but a way of life; we are called to freedom, but not freedom as in I can do what I want to do, serving self above all others; rather freedom through the love of God to serve one another and God because we allow the Holy Spirit to live within us.

One of my favorite songs in church growing up was “*They’ll Know We are Christians by Our Love*”. In that song it speaks of being one in the Spirit, and having the desire for unity to be restored. It also speaks of working with each other side by side and guarding each one’s dignity. It acknowledges that all we have comes from God and it is through the Spirit’s power that brings unity in diversity. That song is all about living life by the Spirit and not legality; God’s law written on our hearts and not on stone tablets. It also proclaims that others will know we are Christians not by our moralism and trying to follow a checklist of dos and don’ts, but from the love that flows forth from our lives.

I think this is what Paul is telling the Galatians in his letter to them. He saw them starting to fall back into a legalistic faith and he wants them to fully embrace the Spirit that is planted within them. He reminds them that freedom in Christ is not about cheap grace being set free to do whatever we want and self-indulge, but about being set free from sin and self-centeredness so that we can live in community loving our neighbor as our self and serving one another in love. Even in Romans 6:1-2 Paul says “*What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?*” As we allow the Spirit to transform us from within --- the law is not set aside, but is fulfilled as our desires become in alignment with the Spirit. This transformation is an ongoing process as we open our lives more fully to the Spirit’s guidance. In other words, the work of faith is precisely the work of the law.

Paul tells us that when we live by the Spirit, we crucify the desires of the flesh such as greed, jealousy, discord, hatred, idolatry to name just a few, which are in conflict with the fruits of the Spirit which are love, peace joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

The Rev. Clover Beal in his sermon “It’s Not About Us” states – “*Paul was not saying that the desires of the flesh are bad in and of themselves. God created desire; healthy desires are what give us life and vitality. It’s when desires become disordered; when they begin to control us that we find ourselves out of step with the Spirit of Jesus.*

A few examples:

A perfectly natural human desire is for meaningful relationships. But left unchecked true intimacy gets substituted with shallow, self-centered encounters.

A natural desire is for enjoyment and contentment. But if unfulfilled, that desire might devolve into excessive use of pain-numbing substances like alcohol, drugs or food.

Most of us desire a safe home and enough material possessions that bring comfort; but left unchecked, our wealth and our “things” begin to control us. We become stingy, ungenerous, or greedy.

A natural desire is for community; left to our human tendencies, our desire can easily become disgruntled feelings toward people who grate on us like sand paper. We want to exchange true community with all its textured diversity for a homogenous one in which we are only with those who are like us.

Our church becomes like us. Our friends are like us. Our political party is filled with those who see the world like us. At its worse, our moral issues become God’s issues.”

(<https://www.fhcbpresb.org/worship-music/2014/11/its-not-about-us-galatians-5-1-13-25/>)

People, this is the type of stuff that brings destruction and causes us to devour each other as Paul points out to the Galatians. The same is true today. Finger pointing whether it be political, theological, cultural ideologies just to name a few gets us nowhere other than creating divisions rather than unity. Rather than being servants to one another we call each other names and fail to see the other as a child of God as well. There is another hymn that proclaims “I Surrender All”. We would like that to be true but the reality is I surrender part. It is not that we don’t live life in the Spirit at all, but that we fail to embrace the fullness of life in the Spirit.

Yet, the Rev. Clover Beal claims, *As we walk with the Spirit, the destructive behaviors toward self and community will gradually subside. When we walk in the Spirit, the actions that keep us from entering the kingdom of God in the present will be disempowered. Christ did not die so that in the afterlife we would finally be free or be saved. He died so that we might experience freedom and salvation in the kingdom of God today, in this moment, in this life.”* (<https://www.fhcbpresb.org/worship-music/2014/11/its-not-about-us-galatians-5-1-13-25/>)

Paul reminds them and us that when one is walking in the Spirit - fruit comes, including love, joy, peace, patience, kindness goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. This however, is not an exhaustive list.

Yesterday at C.J.'s 100th birthday party he proclaimed several times throughout the celebration that the only game where all might win is love and we all need to do better at playing that game. I didn't stay at the party for the entire time, but popped in and out and I still heard this plea from him at least 3 times. I say Amen to that!

The UCC proclaims that God is Still Speaking. In that speaking, God is calling us to life in the Spirit; to be the church and God's presence here on earth. Are we listening to that call and just as important are we answering that call? Are we willing to be the voice for the voiceless, to listen for truth and gain understanding among opposing points of view in order to bring about resolution? Are we willing to burn the bridges that are keeping us from answering God's call? In a world where power and greatness are sought may we remember that it is in you, O God, where fullness of glory is found. Come, Holy God, in your presence there is fullness of glory. Let its power open us to new ways through difficulty, struggle and loss and be led into your Spirit's realm of joy and peace; loving and serving you and loving and serving neighbor as you have loved us. God of love and majesty, help us to remember that freedom in Christ is not about cheap grace that leaves us unchanged in this life, but about being set free from sin, self-centeredness and self-indulgence in order that we might live in community loving neighbor and loving self and in that being servants to one another.

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us; Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us.

Melt us, mold us, fill us, use us. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us. Amen.

HYMN REQUEST:

A TIME OF PRAYER – LIFTING UP PRAYER REQUESTS – THE LORD'S PRAYER:

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY: *

L: Jesus invites us to follow him in all ways, including the use and sharing of our resources.

All: An accounting of our time, talent, and treasure

that reflects our active citizenship in the kingdom brings glory to the Holy One.

These seeds bear fruit.

L: Let us give freely and joyfully as the Spirit Guides

PRAYER OF DEDICATION: *

L: Generous, Abundant, and Precious God, Giver of Gifts

All: receive the resources we bring. May they bless our community and our world.

*May bonds of scarcity be broken as we meet the needs around us
with the gifts that you have first given to us.*

May we be gladdened by giving and rejoice in generosity. Amen.

SUMM-IT UP:

SENDING HYMN: #495 v.v. 1 & 4 *“Called As Partners in Christ's Service”*

BENEDICTION & CHARGE: *

May the Lord bless and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.

May the Lord look upon you kindly and grant you the peace God alone can give.

Having been fed, nourished and blessed by God, as you go in the world, stand firm in the freedom of Christ.

Be guided by and live by the Spirit. Glorify God and bear fruit. Amen.

POSTLUDE:

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